JOYCE MOTT.

A SEASIDE SURPRISE.

SHE doeth little kindnesses,
Which most leave undone or despise,
For naught that sets one heart at ease,
Or giveth happiness or peace,
Is low esteemed in her eyes.

LOWELL.

MY half-sister, Joyce Mott, was a handsome old maid near fifty years of age, but looked much younger. She had a tall, finely-proportioned figure; large, but regular features; a very fresh complexion; jet-black hair slightly frosted with silver; dark-gray, laughing eyes; and a bright, cheerful, kindly expression. This was, indeed, "the outward and visible sign of the inward and spiritual grace"—the sunny spirit that shone on all things and smiled on all people. Her usual dress was a black cashmere, with white collar and cuffs. This sombre style was no expression—as dress is falsely said to be—of *her* character at least. It was assumed not from choice, but from severe economy—for dear sister was only a clerk in the Treasury Department at a salary of fifty dollars a month, and she had me as well as herself to support.

I was the child of my father's old age and second marriage, and thirty years her junior. My mother died when I was but three years old, and Joyce became a second mother to me. Our father, who had been a chief clerk in one of the departments for many years, died in the first year of the war. Our brothers by the first marriage, Frank and Freddie, left college to enter the Union army, and were both killed at the battle of the Wilderness. Ah, me! we were all in the "valley of the shadow of death," and a multitude of widows and orphans were with us there, so we could not selfishly complain. And the Lord was with us, so we could not sinfully despair. We were left penniless,—what government clerk ever saved money?—and Joyce had to become that most unjustly abused and cruelly ridiculed wretch—an "office-seeker." I do believe that if Joyce had possessed the requisite muscular strength I should rather she had gone out washing by the day, and lived in one room on dry bread and tea, than have braved the burning shame of office-seeking. And I know what it is for man or woman! Joyce had just claims and some influence, so had hundreds of others. And

when day after day she went forth, to wait in the lobbies of Congress or in the anterooms of the Executive Mansion or the Departments, or, worse than all, to call on senators or representatives at their rooms or hotels, only—if you please—to get honest employment by which to earn our living—oh! oh! I felt as much ashamed for her as it she had gone to beg our bread from door to door, or even to steal it! She did not share my feelings, simply because she did not think of herself at all. And when, at last, she got her appointment to sit and count pestilential old "greenbacks" to be cancelled, for fifty dollars a month, she was as grateful and delighted as if our Uncle Sam had given her a fortune.

We rented a small white frame house with white shutters and containing four rooms, and a small flower patch before it. It was in the suburbs of the city, full three miles from the Treasury Department. My sister could not afford car fare, so she walked the distance morning and night, and said brightly that she enjoyed it, and that it did her good.

We kept a little negro girl to help me with the housework, and a little Scotch terrier to worship us and to chew up our books and pocket-handkerchiefs.

I do believe that sister Joyce was the most unselfish creature in the whole world. I used to suspect that she had never become conscious of herself as an individual at all! Also, and perhaps for that very reason, she was the happiest and the most joyous. She was so very popular, both in her office and in our quiet neighborhood, that people in trouble came to her for advice; those in want, to be helped; those in sorrow, to be comforted; and those in the "blues," to be cheered up. Her liveliness was inspiring; her laugh, contagious.

And yet, as she was human, she had her seasons—though they were rare—of deep depression. I noticed that these always came on her after she had eaten buckwheat cakes and pork sausage for breakfast, or had committed some similar gastronomic indiscretion. Then she would be haunted by her bugbears—the bugbears that trouble the peace of every one of Uncle Sam's office-holders—the change of administration, loss of office, and, in our case, consequent beggary!

Nor were her forebodings groundless, for her small salary barely sufficed for our plain support and for the charities which she considered her sacred duty. Whenever she read in the papers of some family living, or rather dying slowly, in the squalid room of some

tenement house,—father out of work, mother in the last stages of consumption, children starving and freezing, and, worse than all the rest, all of them poisoned with the inevitable filth in such circumstances,—she would shudder and exclaim :

"Oh, Pollie ! that may be your case if I should lose my office or my health !"

And even then she did not seem to think of herself, but of me and others. And she would send her pittance to the sufferers. So, you see, at the beginning of the month she was "flush," by the end of it she was "bust." There it is again ! I beg sister's pardon, but slang is my besetting vice. I heard her once, when she was more than usually depressed, burst out with this :

"Oh, Pollie ! if it was all over and done with, and you and I were safe in our Heavenly Father's kingdom ! I hope it is not a sin to say so ! But human life is such a fearful thing !—so full of the most awful possibilities !"

It was pork and beans that made life seem worse than "not worth living" in this case. But I wish you to bear in mind that these fits of depression were so exceptional to her happy, sunny disposition that they were entirely unsuspected by anyone out of the house. And, thank heaven ! they were her only forms of illness.

But a great event was at hand. A wonderful thing was to happen to us that year. It came about in this manner :

Every summer, when sister got her vacation, we had to leave our malarious district in Washington for a quiet seaside resort. On these occasions we sent our little "Nig." home for a holiday ; loaned our little dog to a neighbor's child, who adored him ; shut up our little house, which contained nothing to tempt a trespasser ; and set out for our seaside home, as we fondly called "Surf Cliffs" after spending several seasons there ; and which was frequented season after season by the same people—plain folks who could neither afford nor would have enjoyed such fashionable and expensive places as Long Branch or Newport. Even in that cheap house we had to take the very cheapest rooms—those at the top of the building, in the mansard roof, in fact, where the ceilings were low and sloping, the walls of unplaned boards, the floors bare, the windows without shutters, and the doors with heart-shaped holes in the upper panels for ventilation. But oh ! the view ! the view ! It was the very best in the house ! magnificent !

That summer there was quite a colony of us workers up in the

mansard roof—teachers, clerks, saleswomen, and such. With us was a Miss Halleck, principal of some primary school in a certain western city.

Among the more fortunate guests of that season, who occupied the larger and better-furnished rooms below, was a certain wealthy old bachelor by the name of Gill—Job Gill. He had been an iron manufacturer, and had recently retired from business on half a million dollars, which he had invested in safe securities. In person and manners he was singularly unattractive to strangers. He was rather below medium size, thin, wrinkled, with a little red face and a bald crown fringed with a scant growth of iron-gray hair and whiskers. For the first time he had come to our seaside paradise—"for the quiet," he said, though there were ill-natured people who suspected that he came to save money, of which it was certain that he had more than he knew what to do with. And so well pleased was he that he declared his intention to return every season so long as he should live. He was so extremely reserved that he made few acquaintances and no friends. He seldom ventured into the ladies' parlor, and never except when Jane Halleck was present, when he would lurk in the corner nearest her, and from its shadows adore her with his eyes in perfect silence. His infatuation was the talk of the house.

She looked kindly enough on him.

Miss Halleck's holiday was drawing to a close. She was to leave us the next morning. We girlish match-makers, who had been devising every possible and impossible means of bringing affairs between the wealthy bachelor and the poor teacher to a crisis, and had failed in every one, were in despair, when on that morning Jane asked me to get my sister to do a certain little favor for her that night before they should part. I saw my way and laid my plans accordingly.

I must tell you that dear Joyce never had a fit of depression by the sea. She was the very jolliest, brightest, happiest creature in the house. She was the life of the company. But for her the house was rather too quiet.

The ladies' parlor and the gentlemen's parlor, which communicated by wide sliding doors, were such scenes of dulness and monotony that it was a question which ought to take the prize for stupidity. In the first the women sat in rocking chairs and rocked and knitted forever and ever. And in the second the men smoked and played cards, world without end, amen! The guests were

thrown upon their own resources for amusement ; and, roused up by Joyce, they unwrapped from the napkins any talents they may have buried there, and devoted them to the public good.

In the evening some sang songs to the accompaniment of a decrepit piano, some recited poetry, and some told stories. Sister Joyce had no such accomplishments. She could neither sing songs, recite pieces, nor tell stories, though she did inspire those who could. But she could tell fortunes with the cards, and had done so every summer to the wonder and delight of the credulous.

On this memorable evening—this evening which was big with fate that none of us dreamed of in the faintest degree—I had succeeded in making my sister Joyce the captive of my bow and spear, and led her in triumph to the ladies' parlor and ensconced her in a remote corner, farthest from the gentlemen's parlor. Luckily the greater number of our companions had gone over to the camp-meeting in the neighborhood, and our parlor was comparatively deserted. But Jane Halleck and a few others were present. And old Job Gill was lurking in another corner, half buried in a large arm-chair, pretending to read a newspaper—which he could not possibly have done in that darkness—while he furtively peered over its top at Jane Halleck. Jane and the other young women were gathered around my sister, drawing up chairs and sitting down comfortably.

"Miss Mary said you would be so kind as to tell my fortune, Miss Mott," began the schoolmistress.

"Such nonsense !" said my sister—she always appeased her conscience by some such disclaimer before she began her performance ; "such utter nonsense ! Why, I don't believe in it myself !"

"Oh ! but, Miss Joyce, you do tell so true ! Last summer you told one of the waitresses that she would never marry the young man who was courting her, but that she would marry a man she had not yet seen, and that before the year was out, too. And it all came true !" said one of the small audience.

"Did it ? Well, it was a lucky hit ; nothing more."

"Tell my fortune and make a lucky hit for me, Miss Joyce," pleaded another.

"Well, I will if you wish it, after I shall have told Miss Halleck's," replied sister, beginning to shuffle her pack of cards, and looking wistfully at Jane.

"Dark complexion, jet-black hair, and jet-black eyes, and so you run in a spade. Cut !" she said.

Jane Halleck cut the cards.

Old Mr. Gill crept out of his corner, and stole slowly and shyly up to the circle.

"Take a seat, sir," I said, not calling him by his name, as we had never spoken a word between us. And I pushed a vacant chair towards him.

"Not intruding?" he said demurely, smiling.

And I noticed how kind and pleasant his homely face grew when he smiled.

"Oh, no, not at all!" I said; "this is an open *séance*."

"Thank you," he replied, and sank into the chair he had hesitated to occupy.

Jane Halleck looked down and reddened a little.

Sister laid out the cards and began her necromances. She severely ignored the presence of the old man, and of everyone but her first votary, as she proceeded:

Under the inspiration of her three Magi, knowledge of the world, the habit of close observation, and the calculus of probabilities, she told something of the youn gwoman's former life; something more of her present; and having astonished her auditor with her wonderful power, she began to foreshadow the future:

"A gentleman, a little past the noon of life,—that was the complimentary manner in which she alluded to old Mr. Gill,—robust, healthy, intellectual, and wealthy, was very much pleased with the inquirer: indeed, was very much attached to her, and would soon make an offer of marriage, if he had not already done so: they would certainly marry and live as happily together as mortals, subject to the trials of life, could expect to do."

"It is wonderful! perfectly wonderful, how truly you tell!" whispered Miss Halleck, as she arose, took a back seat, and gave place to the next votary.

But whispers sometimes go farther than they are intended, and Jane Halleck's reached old Gill, whose face was all wrinkled up with smiles.

One girl after another tried her fate, and arose from the oracle well pleased.

Not until all the little company of girls had been made happy in their "fool's paradise" did the sibyl turn to the little old lover who had sat there smiling on everybody during the whole scene.

"Shall I tell your fortune, Mr. Gill?" she inquired, pleasantly.

She had never exchanged a word with him befere, nor had he

been introduced to her. But Joyce did not mind that. She had inferred from Jane Halleck's last words that the backward lover had only to ask and he would receive, and she wanted to urge him on to his good fortune. And this from motives of pure benevolence, too! For what was it to her personally that the lonely old money-bags and the poor young schoolmistress should be made happy? Well, this: to make them happy would give her much pleasure, so she repeated her question:

"Will you let me tell your fortune, Mr. Gill?"

"Thank you, fortune all told," said the old man, briefly, but not curtly, for he was smiling on the kindly woman who was beaming on him. But he habitually dropped his pronouns as cockneys drop their h's.

"Oh no, indeed! Your fortune isn't all told by any means. You have a future before you!" remonstrated sister, brightly, as she shuffled the cards for him.

"Not much! Sixty-five!" sighed the old man; but his smile contradicted the hopelessness of his words.

"Sixty-five years to come is a good long time!" said sister, pretending to misunderstand his words. "Then you would be one hundred and thirty! I read in the paper the other day of one John Stout, who died at one hundred and thirty-three in Alton, Maine, who kept his health and faculties, and worked in his garden to the last. And you know we have heard of other such."

"Exceptions to rule."

"Yes! but *you* should be good to live to ninety-five, or ninety at least, if you take care of yourself and take steps to make your life happy. Come, cut the cards, and see what may be in store for you in the next twenty-five or thirty years," said the sibyl, laying the pack at his hand.

He complied in a bashful sort of way.

"The queen of spades! A handsome, dark-haired lady," said the sibyl, turning the card he had cut.

"That so?" he queried, with a half-delighted, half-ashamed look.

"Yes, indeed! Cut again!"

He did so.

"Ace of hearts! Love!"

"Love?"

"Yes, indeed! Your fortune promises finely. Cut once more!"

He obeyed the order.

"Ten of hearts! A wedding!" exclaimed the sibyl, triumphantly.

"Whose?" rather excitedly queried the old lover.

"We'll see!" she said.

The cards now lay in three parts, into which he had cut them. She pointed to the first part.

"This," she said, "relates to your past life. Shall I tell you its events?"

"Thank you. Know all about that. Don't want to hear."

"Then I will only say, to connect it with the present, that all your past life you have been unconsciously waiting for the advent of the handsome dark-haired lady—represented by the queen of spades, the card you cut—who is destined to make the remainder of your existence by far the happiest part of it."

"Hope so," dubiously remarked Gill.

"To pass to the second division, which represents the present," she said, taking up the cards in question.

"Know about the present, too. Want to hear about the future."

"Very well, then; but I must keep the links together by reminding you that you cut the ace of hearts, which means that your present is dominated by love. At the third trial—for your future—you cut the ten of hearts, which promises a wedding. And now I shuffle the whole three parcels together, for the influence of your past and present upon the future of your life, and the final outcome," she concluded, suiting the action to the words, and then laying out the cards and telling him to look at them.

"All dark mystery," he said.

"Oh, not at all! It is all as plain as daylight, and quite as sunny. Why, Mr. Gill, you are a very happy man, if you did but know it. Now look! Here is that queen of spades, the dark-eyed lady; she has her face turned toward you. You can see for yourself. You are the king of spades, and you have your face turned towards her. See! these hearts stand for her thoughts—all fixed on you; and they are all warm, friendly, and even affectionate."

"Want to know!" he muttered.

"Yes! But there is one dark card that stands between you. The deuce of spades, which signifies your hesitation, which keeps you from speaking your mind to her, and is really the only obstacle to your happiness."

"Do tell!" chuckled the old man, his face one broad smile.

By this time I saw that Sister Joyce had quite forgotten herself—

forgotten that she was a woman talking to a man, and subject to misconstruction, criticism, and animadversion—and remembered only the pair in whom she was so unselfishly interested. The being called Joyce Mott was away off in the immensity of space, lost to herself, and there remained of her here only a voice in the desert of an old bachelor's life. But though unconscious of herself, she was in her glory while giving pleasure to another. Her color was bright, her eyes were laughing, her whole face was radiant with the delight of delighting. She felt so sure now that she was helping on a happy match, though most of her confidence arose from the recollection of the parting words of the dark-eyed Jane Halleck, who, by the way, had long since withdrawn from the circle and retired to her room to finish her packing.

"Yes!" said sister, in reply to the old man's incredulous murmurs, and unobservant of an accession to her audience of two matrons just returned from camp-meeting, and who seemed to be tittering, but whether at sister, old Mr. Gill, or both, I did not know.

"Yes," she repeated, "you have only to offer yourself to be accepted."

"Wouldn't have me!" he growled.

"Oh, but you heard what she said to me? Now you must try her. You really must."

"Too old! She wouldn't have me!"

"Oh, yes she will! Just try her."

"Too old. Sixty-five!"

"Why no, she isn't! She is only twenty-nine," said sister, pretending to misunderstand him again.

"Me! Sixty-five! Too old!" laconically explained the old man.

"You! Oh, no! a man is never too old to marry! There was Commodore Blank, who married a young wife in his seventieth year, and has been happy in that union for the last ten years. And there is the old king of Holland, who married a lovely young princess when he was over seventy, and is now the father of an angelic little girl. And there are others I could tell you of. And you are quite a young man compared to them."

"Nice—to have a home of one's own! Fine woman at head of table!" he mumbled to himself.

"It would be indeed!" cried sister, with enthusiasm.

"Handsome woman! Velvet gown! Jewels!"

"Oh, yes; she would so well become them."

"Sparkling woman! Laugh! Chat! Keep house lively!"

"Yes, indeed. Only think of it!"

"Go long o' me to Europe."

"Delightful! Now you will try your fortune, will you not?"

"Sure to get sacked."

"I feel quite sure that you will not, if you will do your part. She does not leave until three o'clock. That will give you time enough. Now promise me that you will take heart and try," urged my sister, quite unconscious of the tittering women around her.

"Yes. Promise. Faithful," responded Mr. Gill.

The circle was beginning to break. Sister arose. We bade good-night and left the parlor, followed by the two ladies who had returned late from the camp-meeting. They were our neighbors under the mansard roof. Going upstairs they doubled up with laughter.

"What are you laughing at?" innocently inquired Joyce.

They could not answer just then. Indeed, her question set them off again. At length one of them replied:

"Oh, my dear, at that ridiculous old man! You have made a conquest. He could never be drawn into any of our games before! You have conquered him!"

"Heaven grant it!" exclaimed my sister, still in the interest of Jane Halleck. And we parted on the landing.

"I think you have made that match, Joyce. But oh! how they all laughed at that old gorilla!" I said, as soon as we had reached the privacy of our own room.

"Don't call him gorilla, Pollie," said my literal sister; "I think he is one of the most good-natured old fellows I ever saw. And indeed, when he is talking and smiling he is not ugly at all. And mind you, when a person's good looks depend upon a smile, they are more than skin deep. I hope Jane Halleck may never make him remember his age."

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The next day we saw nothing of Mr. Gill or Miss Halleck until the two o'clock dinner; and then, as they sat at a distant table, we got no chance to speak to either.

Half an hour later we were all assembled in the parlor, waiting to see Jane Halleck off in the three o'clock boat. Mr. Gill was there, close beside Jane. He was smiling benignantly upon all the world. He turned to sister, and said:

"Mean to try."

"Do so, Mr. Gill, and may heaven prosper you," she replied.

The whistle of the approaching boat was heard, and there was a sudden confusion of hand-shaking and good-byes, and the departing guests left us to walk down to the pier, followed by Mr. Gill and a little group of particular friends to see Miss Halleck on the boat. It was only a ferry-boat that took passengers to the nearest railroad station on the mainland, where they could take the train or steamer, as they pleased.

"There! that backward old fellow has delayed asking the momentous question until now; and I suppose he is going on the boat with her!" sighed my sister, who began to tremble for the success of her match-making.

"I think he is going with her. He has taken his gripsack and umbrella with him," I observed.

We did not see anything more of our friend that day. He had gone on the boat with Miss Halleck. But the next morning we saw him at the breakfast table, opposite the chair left vacant by the departure of Miss Halleck.

After breakfast sister and I were sitting on the piazza by ourselves, as it happened, when Mr. Gill came walking slowly up to us.

"Sit here? You don't mind?" he inquired, and at sister's smile and nod of assent he took the seat beside her on the bench.

"Something to say! Very particular! Must out with it!" he began. I arose to leave them.

"Don't go. You heard all about it last night. Might's well hear the upshot now. Sit down."

I resumed my seat. I thought he was going to tell sister the result of his proposal to Miss Halleck.

"That promise," he said, edging a little closer to sister.

"Yes, Mr. Gill, and I hope you have come to tell me that you have kept it. And that is all right," she said.

"Come to keep it now! Faithful!" he muttered. She stared.

"Faithful!" he repeated. "So when will you marry me?"

"I!—marry—you!—Mr. Gill!!" she exclaimed, crimsoning all over her face with mortification, not unmixed with mirthfulness.

"Yes! Handsome dark-haired lady!"

Sister put her hands up to her own raven silvered tresses in a bewildered sort of way, and could not get over her amazement and confusion.

"Handsome dark-haired lady! Bright! Sparkling! Well

pleased! Willing! Velvet gowns! Diamonds! Head of table! Life of house! Travel! Europe!" the old man went on somewhat incoherently, ignoring her consternation.

"But, oh! Mr. Gill, I was talking about Jane Halleck all the time! Jane Halleck, you know! We all thought you wanted to marry her."

"Very fond of her. Janie's my god-daughter. Engaged to Methodist parson. Gave her a thousand this morning to set up housekeeping. Good girl, Janie! When will you marry me?"

"But, Mr. Gill, it is very" (she was about to say impertinent, but in the kindness of her heart she changed the word) "very strange in you to make such a proposal to me. You have not known me two days."

"Known you ever since you have been here. Went into the parlor every night to see you. Kept eyes on you. You are the soul of the company. Jolly! Merry! Made everybody happy! Wouldn't had the pluck, though, old man of sixty-five, to make up to handsome woman. You begun it. When shall it be?"

"But, Mr. Gill," said Joyce, her mortification giving way to her sense of humor, "you—if you wish to marry—should choose a young woman, and raise a family of children to comfort you in your decline of life."

"Comfort? Children? Chicken-pox! Whooping-cough! Measles! Up all night! No, don't want children. Want you. When shall it be? The third time of asking."

"And the last, Mr. Gill. I am too old to marry. But I hope we may continue friends, for I really like you very much."

"Hard lines. Handsome dark-haired woman. Draw a man on till—make a fool of himself, then flout off!" grumbled the old fellow, turning away.

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Sister Joyce is not a treasury clerk now, and she is profoundly indifferent to all changes in the administration. She had not been easily persuaded to "make herself ridiculous," as she expressed it, but the old codger—gentleman, I mean, for since I have been in society I am trying to break myself of slang—the old gentleman was a persevering suitor, and followed us to Washington, where Joyce did her best to marry him to one or another of her female friends, but in vain.

He had the "handsome dark-haired lady, sparkling, bright," on his brain, as well as in his heart, and at last he won her.

They had a quiet wedding, and went to Europe and took me with them, for they would not hear of my being left behind.

On their return, at the end of six months, they set up a fine house in the city, where sister might be in society if she chose, but she did not choose. I, however, who live with them as a daughter, make up for all remissness. I go everywhere.

Sister could also go to Newport and other fashionable summer resorts if she pleased, but she does not please. So we all go to our old place every season, where we meet the same old friends, and among them Jane Goodman, *née* Halleck, and her clerical husband. But we no longer lodge under the mansard roof. We have the largest suite of apartments on the second floor, and we need them, for sister has twins, a bouncing boy and girl, who are the wonder, pride, and delight of their father. The old man indulges in no more sarcasms about "Comfort? Children? Chicken-pox! Whooping-cough! Measles! Up all night!" He dreads disease only for the sake of his darlings, and not on account of discomfort to himself. I am sure he would be willing to be up all night and every night in their service.

Their names? Oh, yes! Job and Joyce!

EMMA D. E. N. SOUTHWORTH.

FAVORITE NOVELS OF AMERICAN NOVELISTS.

IN the March number of BELFORD'S MAGAZINE we published an article from a clever English author, in which the favorite reading of Albion's recognized dealers in prose fiction was given over their own signatures. Believing a like showing of our American novelists would be acceptable to our readers, we addressed to a large number of the former a circular note asking for their favorites. It was not clearly understood. We did not call upon them as critics to give what they considered best, but what they liked most. There is a well-defined difference between the two conditions. What the public wants is a reflection of the author's mind, to be gathered from what he loves to read. For example, if a literary Robinson Crusoe were suddenly called on to select two or three books from the sinking ship's library to console his weary hours on a desert island, he would not seize on the standard works, but the few dear old friends in whose companionship he had found sympathetic aid and comfort. Were we the shipwrecked mariner, the two or three books we would